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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000047

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [TH](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Day two of talks: GSL and LTTE agree that further discussion of security zone issue is needed

Refs: (A) Ops Center/Colombo 01/08/03 telecon  
- (B) SA/INS-Colombo 01/07/03 telecon  
- (C) Colombo 39, and previous

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: On day two of talks in Thailand (January 7), the GSL and Tamil Tigers began discussing the sensitive Jaffna security zone issue. The two sides did not reach agreement on how to handle the zones, but they agreed to continue discussing the matter. On a negative note, the Tigers reiterated that they have no intention of participating in the de-escalation sub-committee until the security zones are dealt with. The talks seem to be going relatively well, but the security zone issue is proving problematic. END SUMMARY.

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DAY TWO: NO AGREEMENT ON SECURITY ZONES  
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2. (SBU) Day two of talks (January 7) between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) took place in a "cordial" atmosphere, according to the Norwegian government facilitators. (Note: The talks are taking place at a resort hotel in the Bangkok area from January 6-9 -- see Reftels. The parties are scheduled to hold a press conference on January 10.) With respect to day two's substance, both sides began discussing the sensitive issue of the Sri Lankan military's "high security zones" in Jaffna District. They did not reach agreement on how to handle the zones during their preliminary discussions. Anton Balasingham, the chief Tiger negotiator, continued to make clear that the LTTE wanted to see the zones reduced in size. Balasingham told the press that the LTTE would not accept any effort to link a possible military withdrawal from the zones with disarmament of LTTE cadre wanting to enter them.

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SECURITY ZONES REMAIN ON THE AGENDA  
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3. (SBU) The two sides did agree to continue discussing the security zone issue during the remainder of the talks. (Note: An outside observer, a retired Indian general named Sathish Nambiar, is reportedly producing a report on the security zones. Contacts told Mission that the plan is for this report to be presented to the parties as a basis for further discussions at the talks -- and, if need be, after.) In the meantime, the two sides agreed to work to ensure the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to non-security zone-located points of origin in the north. Commenting on this latter agreement, G.L. Peiris, a key GSL negotiator, told the press that the GSL and LTTE "decided to deal with the problem of the security zones in a sensible way by dealing with things that can be immediately solved like displaced person returns to other areas."

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LTTE: SUB-COMMITTEE IS "DEFUNCT"  
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4. (SBU) On a negative note, the Tigers reiterated that they have no intention of participating any longer in the "De-escalation and Normalization" Sub-Committee. In his remarks to the press on January 7, Balasingham made clear that he considered the sub-committee "defunct" and "useless," specifically adding that the group would not be attending a January 14 meeting of the sub-committee called by the GSL. In suspending Tiger participation in the sub-committee, Balasingham underlined that the Tigers wanted the security zone issue dealt with at the political-level talks and he emphasized that Tiger participation in those talks was not affected by its decision to withdraw from the sub-committee. He also promised that the Tigers would continue to participate in the "Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North and East" Sub-Committee. (Note: Both of these sub-committees were formed during the second round

of talks held in early November.) For its part, the GSL has announced that it wants the de-escalation sub-committee to continue its work.

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REACTION  
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15. (C) The talks appear to be meeting the expectations of Colombo observers. Kethesh Loganathan of the Center for Policy Alternatives, a well-regarded local think-tank, told polchief January 8 that it was clear going into the talks that the issue of the security zones would a difficult one to resolve. He thought it was constructive that the two sides had agreed to continue to discuss the issue, while working on other matters, such as ways to move forward on developmental assistance and resettlement. Gajen Ponnambalam, a MP for the Tamil National Alliance, agreed that it was positive that there had not been a breakdown in the talks over the security zone issue. He stressed, however, that the issue of the zones was a "vital" one for Tamils that needed to be resolved quickly.

16. (SBU) (((Note: Both Loganathan and Ponnambalam ridiculed press play in government-controlled newspapers asserting that the two sides had somehow "settled" the security zone issue. Loganathan said this type of coverage was just "spin" by the GSL. Ponnambalam was also mystified by reporting by wire services, including Reuters and AP, highlighting the Tigers' decision not to participate in the de-escalation sub-committee as if it was some sort of major crisis for the peace process. He noted that the LTTE had "clearly signaled" its intent to take this action in public comments made last week, while it noted at the same time that it still supported the peace process. End Note.)))

17. (U) (((Note: In late-breaking news from day three of the talks, January 8, wire services are reporting that the two sides have agreed to give the World Bank a direct role in aid disbursements for the north and east.)))

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) Based on what we are hearing, the talks seem to be going relatively well. As expected, the security zone issue is proving problematic. It seems likely that the two sides may not be able to agree on a framework providing for the resolution of this issue at this round of talks. If they do, however, it would a major breakthrough at this point. While not unexpected given its previous public comments, the Tigers' decision not to participate in the de-escalation sub-committee was unfortunate. The action highlights just how serious the group takes the security zone issue and its willingness to pressure the GSL on the matter. END COMMENT.

19. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS